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SUBJECT: ANC CONFIDENT OF CONTINUED STRENGTH IN NORTHERN
CAPE CAPITAL DESPITE SERVICE DELIVERY HICCOUGHS

REF: A. 05 PRETORIA 4585 (NOTAL)

[1](#)B. 06 PRETORIA 347

(U) This cable is Sensitive But Unclassified. Not for
Internet distribution.

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: The ANC heads into local elections in
the Northern Cape's main urban area confident of another
overwhelming showing. Some progress in expanding service
delivery and a weak and fractured opposition are the
basis for that optimism. Nonetheless, persistent
unhappiness over service and housing availability among
the poorest residents of Sol Plaatje municipality, which
includes the provincial capital of Kimberley, help
explain why the election run-up has been generally low
key amid some expressions of apathy and voter
consternation toward the ANC. End Summary.

The Background

[1](#)2. (SBU) This cable is one of a series by an interagency
Mission team to report how local government service
delivery is affecting the March 1 local elections, as
well as to report on the run-up to the elections
themselves (Reftels A, B). The Reporting Officer visited
Sol Plaatje municipality, which is home to roughly one
quarter of the more than 800,000 residents of the
Northern Cape, on February 16-17. Although the Northern
Cape is the largest of South Africa's nine provinces, it
is the least populous.

[1](#)3. (U) Kimberley itself is best known as a diamond
mining center, a fact reflected in the names of the
local newspaper -- The Diamond Field Advertiser (DFA) --
and the community radio station ? Radio Teemaneng, which
means "'diamond" in the local dialect. Kimberley boasts
very few multistory buildings but is quite proud of its
one very Big Hole -- an open pit some 800 meters deep
where diamonds were mined until 1914. It is the city's
major tourist attraction. Although some local mining
continues, diamonds are not forever in Kimberley; a few
thousand people lost their jobs last year due to mine
closures, contributing to an official municipal
unemployment rate of 26%, roughly the same as the
national rate.

ANC Confidence

14. (SBU) To hear Sol Plaatje Executive Mayor Patrick Lenyibi assess the upcoming elections, the ANC hasn't a worry. Dressed in Adidas T-shirt and blue sweatpants as he chats in his comfortable downtown office, he predicted his party would win about 45 municipal council seats, up from the 40 it now holds (the body itself will expand from 53 to 55 seats). He expected the ANC would win 90 percent of the municipal vote, up from 79 percent four years ago, and turnout would be high. He dismissed the opposition Independent Democrats as a "non-starter" political party; he pooh-poohed the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) as a prayer group; and he was untroubled by the Democratic Alliance (DA), which holds most of the remaining municipal council seats with support from whites and from some of the Afrikaans-speaking mixed-race community that accounts for about one-fourth the local population.

Service Delivery and Housing Problems ?

15. (SBU) Local journalists, while acknowledging the ANC should win handily, were not sure the victory will be of quite the magnitude Lenyibi predicts. DFA Managing Editor Johan du Plessis said there had been little electoral excitement, and he believed enthusiasm for the ANC had diminished. Unemployment, health care and housing all remain contentious issues among some of the electorate. Although a reported 90 percent of local residents have access to basic services such as water, sanitation and electricity -- a substantially higher proportion than the national average -- some people have been enraged by services shut off for not paying bills.

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16. (SBU) Lenyibi acknowledged there was frustration over services and said officials sometimes unrealistically promised quick action. But he was satisfied that progress was being made at an acceptable pace. "What communities want to see is visibility of leadership," he said, which means that he often scurries into the field responding to complaints. Just before speaking with the Reporting Officer he visited the Soul City neighborhood, where he got an earful from residents recently resettled in new government housing. Among the litany of problems they told the Reporting Officer, who visited soon after the mayor, were no electricity, poorly constructed homes, frequent flooding and faulty plumbing.

17. (SBU) Sophia Elizabeth Veldtman, a mother of four who moved into a new Soul City home a year ago, used a broom as a pointer to show where the walls were cracking and the cement was falling out. She said that her home flooded when the rains come. Still, she was thankful she no longer lives in a makeshift shack in a nearby shantytown. "I can't say it is bad. I am just happy with what the government gave me." Similar sentiments were heard from other Soul City residents, and when Poppy Mlambo, speaker of the Sol Plaatje Municipal Council, drove up in her metallic-red Toyota compact SUV, the few residents who gathered around treated her with respect. Yet there was little overt sign of enthusiasm for the ANC in Soul City other than a sea of campaign posters, and it was jarring to see a smattering of DA campaign posters plastered to the walls of homes funded by the ANC government.

? And Ensuing Anger

18. (SBU) The mood was uglier in parts of Greenpoint, an informal settlement of corrugated-metal shacks just outside Kimberley proper where residents, many of them

mixed race, earlier threatened to boycott the election because of lack of services. Their primary complaint was the continued use of a single communal "bucket" toilet, whose description by locals so nauseated the Reporting Officer that he declined to investigate himself. "I won't vote March 1," said a man named August as he repaired a bed headboard in his yard. "Eleven years voting and my life is still the same. We're like stepladders for the politicians." Other Greenpoint residents who have moved into new, government-supplied homes were less agitated but still waiting to finally get electricity. "I can't use a television, I can't use a fridge, I can't use an iron kettle," Nick Williams, 64, said while standing outside his ramshackle convenience store.

¶9. (SBU) Perhaps the most serious local protest over services came last year when residents of Roodepan township in northwest Kimberley blocked streets with burning tires to protest service cuts to those who couldn't pay. Romeo Ackeer, whose wife is the local ACDP candidate for municipal council, said he hears lots of complaints from residents whose electricity and water have been turned off. "People are sick and tired. They don't want to vote." Immanuel Mokallee, a neighborhood ANC leader whose lovely home includes a veranda lined with hedges and pink vincas, saw it differently, pointing to paved roads and a new community multipurpose center as recent improvements. He said government was broadening services as fast as its limited resources allowed.

¶10. (SBU) Comment: Many of Sol Plaatje municipality's neediest people believe the ANC has not been sufficiently responsive to their requests for improved services and housing. While this has only rarely led to protests and does not endanger the ANC's local political dominance in the near term, there can be little doubt that the ANC risks a further erosion of prestige among an important core constituency should its perceived performance not improve. End Comment.

TEITELBAUM